

In Recognition of American Heart Month

Mr. DORGAN: Mr. President, today marks the start of American Heart Month. I note the occasion not as a reminder to my colleagues to purchase flowers or chocolates for their loved ones for Valentine's Day, but as a reminder that we need to redouble our efforts to fight heart disease, stroke and other cardiovascular diseases.

More than 80 million Americans – about one in three adults – are living with some form of cardiovascular disease. Heart disease remains the leading cause of death in America and stroke is the number three killer. These devastating diseases have touched the lives of nearly every family in America.

Heart disease, stroke and other cardiovascular diseases will cost our nation more than \$430 billion in 2007, including more than \$284 billion in direct medical costs.

While it is true that we are making some progress, we can't win the fight against heart disease, stroke and other cardiovascular diseases without the support of Congress and the Administration. Next week, the President will send Congress a budget proposal for fiscal year 2008. The budget is more than just a lengthy document – it is a statement of our nation's priorities. I believe investing in cardiovascular research, prevention and treatment programs should be one of our highest priorities.

I was disappointed by the budget the President proposed last year. The Administration's proposal would have scaled back funding for heart disease and stroke research at the National Institutes of Health (NIH), prevention programs at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and a program that helps rural communities purchase life-saving medical equipment.

The Administration's fiscal year 2007 budget would have cut funding for the National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute by \$21 million and the National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke by \$11 million. I am grateful that Congress rejected this proposal. Our investment in the NIH holds enormous promise to turn the tide against so many devastating diseases, including heart disease and stroke.

The President also proposed scaling back funding for the heart disease and stroke prevention program at the CDC. This program helps states design and implement plans to prevent cardiovascular disease before it occurs. Despite the fact that heart disease is the number one cause of death in the country and stroke is the number three killer, the CDC does not have enough funding to implement this important program in all states. The CDC provides funding for 19 states to develop plans and another 14 states to implement the plans.

Finally, the Administration tried to eliminate funding for a program that helps rural communities purchase automated external defibrillators (AEDs). AEDs are small, laptop size devices that help restore normal heart function after cardiac arrest. AEDs save lives, especially when placed in areas where large numbers of people congregate and in rural communities where emergency medical personnel are not readily available. I believe Congress should continue to provide grants to help communities purchase these lifesaving devices.

I hope that the President does not send Congress another budget that proposes draconian cuts in funding for heart disease and stroke research, prevention and treatment programs. Failing to make these investments will have real consequences. It is projected that, if we don't act today, deaths from heart disease alone will increase by nearly 130 percent by 2050.

I encourage my colleagues to take a few minutes during February to recognize American Heart Month and to join me in starting a national dialogue about making the fight against cardiovascular disease a priority.